

***State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*** by James Risen. Free Press, 2006, 232 pp., \$15.00.

*State of War* seeks to document the failure of a few key leaders in the Central Intelligence Agency and the Bush administration in preparing for and conducting the early phases of the American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as efforts to counteract Iran's efforts to gain nuclear weapons.

By calling his work a history, *New York Times* reporter James Risen implies that it contains most of these features: a logical, comprehensive, substantiated, and balanced discussion of some of the most important and controversial issues of this decade. Instead, this book is a very long editorial that mixes in a few lesser-known names and incidents to a rehash of sensational headlines, scattered about various chapters that concentrate on criticizing a few individuals. Little of the narrative is fresh to a reader aware of world events, and it offers nothing in the form of notes, bibliography, or suggested reading to help a researcher who wants to know more.

In short, *State of War* is a passing partisan shot at some controversial policies of a lame duck administration whose mistakes may well "bequeath nearly unbridled executive power to President Hillary Clinton" (last statement of the book). Mr. Risen's political sympathies drench at least part of every chapter.

Although Mr. Risen critiques many government officials, he singles out George Tenet (CIA director, 1997–2004) and Donald Rumsfeld (secretary of defense, 1975–1977 and 2001–2006). Messrs. Tenet and Rumsfeld made some controversial, even dubious, decisions during their terms in high office; most readers already know this. What would be more useful is knowing what prompted them to do these things and whether or not the circumstances that allowed such actions were unique. Risen presents the problems of Tenet and Rumsfeld as personality flaws. It would be more useful to know whether or not these flaws were accentuated by a unique combination of events (9/11, strong president, and the same party running Congress, etc.) or by recurring circumstances with dangerous potential (comparisons with the Truman, Johnson, and Nixon administrations would be useful here).

Although I think that the story line of *State of War* is choppy and poorly supported in many parts, it does a worthwhile job in other areas. The coverage of the Abu Zubaydah case and the CIA prison system (chap. 1) was interesting and plausible, as was the discussion about the odd status of Ahmed Chalabi (chap. 3). Details about the Saudi sources of funds for al-Qaeda were intriguing (chap. 8), but some background on Saudi society, its government, and the Wahhabi sect of Islam would have been useful to make this point more plausible.

Sections of *State of War* that need substantial improvement include lack of control on the National Security Agency's eavesdropping (chap. 2) and why the CIA placed so much faith in one unreliable agent ("Curveball") concerning Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (chap. 5). By focusing strictly on CIA-Pentagon differences, the author mostly ignores the influence of the US Department of

State, congressional power politics and posturing, Britain, and the United Nations (chap. 6).

*State of War* offers little that a few selected articles from the *New York Times* or Internet could not. I do not recommend this book for purchase by either individuals or the Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center. Perhaps Mr. Risen's next anthology of headlines will have more usable and lasting significance for our military readers.

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